

Lena Dias

IMGD 1002

Dean O'Donnell

5 May 2020

### GrannieQuest ARG Postmortem

Recently, I was the gameplay lead on an ARG for *GrannieQuest*, an ARG that found players tracking down carrot cake recipes and time-bending tools in a quest to keep the future out of hands of evil corporations. This was my first time as a gameplay lead and working on an ARG, and it shows. That said, I think we had a good product at the end! Here's what I learned.

#### **What I did for our ARG**

As mentioned, I was the gameplay lead on this project, so most of my time was spent managing other personnel on the gameplay team and making sure their work was running along smoothly. My main idea was to assign people two puzzles a day, leave the intricate details of each puzzle up to their designers, and then foster communication between designers to make sure all puzzles connected properly. In addition, I went through and verified the individual steps of the puzzles, playtesting them myself and making sure things were all in place for live execution during the week. I also designed three puzzles myself; the rabbit hole, the lightbulb app for locating the mechanism, and the method for finding the CEO's coordinates.

If you want further details, you can find the puzzle signup sheet (with my design documents) [here](#) and the verification sheet [here](#).

### **What went right**

\_\_\_\_\_ In general, things went smoothly, and I could count on my team to do what they needed (with some occasional prodding). Most people seemed to have a grasp on fair, communicative puzzle design and were in frequent communication. Lots of puzzles were modular, so we were able to interweave the story easily, and most adjustments were not to puzzles, but to the story itself. This allowed us to avoid reworking our puzzles constantly. Putting due dates on things was by far the best motivator, from what I could tell. Things ran mostly smoothly while the actual ARG was happening, mostly due to frequent communication with *other* teams. It seemed that the puzzles that involved snooping through files and breaking codes were most popular.

### **What went wrong**

\_\_\_\_\_ Our most notable problem with the ARG happened while running it—our testing wasn't thorough enough, so reasonably curious players were able to find some of our later puzzles in an assets folder early by looking at a previous URL, which threw the last few days out of whack and left us with little content for said days. By far the most grievous error throughout the project.

However, there were additional minor errors here and there. Some of our puzzles contradicted with each other, as our playtesting process did not review some supporting materials, like assets provided by the writing team. This led to an issue where the results of one puzzle provided lore that contradicted a later puzzle, which made executing the later puzzle more difficult.

Additionally, as great as communication was, there were still some difficulties here and there. A lot of additional legwork with DMs had to be done to make sure different teams knew

what assets had to be made for puzzles. In addition, some puzzle designers made assumptions about the story (which was not yet fully completed) or made assumptions about the kind of information other designers' puzzles would contain. As such, we had to double back and rewrite a few puzzles and small unpolished things slipped through the cracks, resulting in a rougher product overall. Teammates also did not provide enough detail for the tech team to create their puzzles.

### **Lessons learned (or what I'd do differently if I knew then what I know now)**

I think making sure that playtesting involved outsiders (preferably, other teams, since involving potential players with no accountability would be a huge risk) would have helped to make sure nothing slipped through the cracks.

I also think that additional organization would've helped a lot with inter-team communication; for example, we had asset to-do lists for other teams to work off of, but they weren't consolidated into a single list, making knowing what was done and what needed to be done difficult. Additionally, involving other teams further in our design process (and involving ourselves in say, the writing process) would have helped to minimize reworking of puzzles.

However, I would say our ARG was generally a success. My main lessons learned as a leader were to divide up tasks, create accountability through deadlines, and to foster frequent intergroup/intragroup communication. As a designer, my lessons were to design puzzles with modularity in mind (if the story is not fully in place) and to design difficulty with the audience and their available free time in mind.

## Bibliography

1. Puzzles signup sheet

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/100HNKI6ToWsaOYymKzkgJCu-H3lM9P8ulYwDeEelZk/edit>

2. Player schedule (joint effort between Olivia, Luna, and Lena):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1omZBP6PtdoBCK3c6hYVeUzSWUjRuibkqdgOk8frVDk/edit>

3. Rabbit hole puzzle (Luna, Lena):

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1\\_qk95X8qkeSwJY-H\\_gM3H7Qn\\_BKSmiUvnckAwLEARfM/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_qk95X8qkeSwJY-H_gM3H7Qn_BKSmiUvnckAwLEARfM/edit)

4. Timed puzzle (Lena):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z3TmiwESBEQuSFHelWzx9bg3HDsqHZYjvF6Qcx357cA/edit>

5. CEO location puzzle (Lena):

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sP8LfA4ZTMACrTzc\\_MPPhmTr61Z\\_QqhfJ1ddiknNOHk/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sP8LfA4ZTMACrTzc_MPPhmTr61Z_QqhfJ1ddiknNOHk/edit)